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DR. DWIGHT'S DISCOURSE,

BEFORE THE

CONGREGATIONAL BOARD OF PUBLICATION,

MAY 30, 1855.

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Characteristics of New England Theology.

A

DISCOURSE,

DELIVERED AT THE

FIRST PUBLIC ANNIVERSARY

OF THE

CONGREGATIONAL BOARD OF PUBLICATION,

AT THE TREMONT TEMPLE, BOSTON.

BY WILLIAM T. DWIGHT, D. D.
Pastor of the Third Congregational Church, Portland.

BOSTON:
CONGREGATIONAL BOARD OF PUBLICATION.
1855.

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DISCOURSE.

ECCLESIASTES XII. 9—11.

AND MOREOVER, BECAUSE THE PREACHER WAS WISE, HE STILL TAUGHT THE PEOPLE KNOWLEDGE; YEA, HE GAVE GOOD HEED, AND SOUGHT OUT AND SET IN ORDER MANY PROVERBS. THE PREACHER SOUGHT TO FIND OUT ACCEPTABLE WORDS: AND THAT WHICH WAS WRITTEN WAS UPRIGHT, EVEN WORDS OF TRUTH. THE WORDS OF THE WISE ARE AS GOADS, AND AS NAILS FASTENED BY THE MASTERS OF ASSEMBLIES, WHICH ARE GIVEN FROM ONE SHEPHERD.

AT the last year's anniversary of this Society, it first assumed the name which it now bears, and which it will probably retain while it shall exist. Its original name was "The Doctrinal Tract and Book Society;" the title by which it is now known, is, "The Congregational Board of Publication." The latter designation is, indeed, less comprehensive, less assuming, than the former; but in assuming its present more specific and exactly descriptive name, it will gain, we trust, far more in efficiency than it has lost in comprehensiveness of title. The Tracts and the Books which it has published, from its organization until the present time, have been distinctively Congregational in doctrine: this has been their peculiar merit with

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its avowed friends, this is, in every instance, but the execution of the primary design of its founders. While wishing 'Godspeed' to all kindred evangelical associations, while asserting for themselves no liberty to which others, whatever their religious faith, may not lay an equal claim, these founders and their associates have been avowed Congregationalists; and if still more precision is demanded, Puritan Congregationalists. To all who would thus describe themselves, and to all who are generally fellow helpers with us to the truth as it is in Jesus, no title can appear more appropriate than that of "The Congregational Board of Publication."

Allusion has been just made to the primary design of the founders of this Society. That this may be fully understood, it will be proper for me to quote the second article of its Constitution. "It is the object of this Society to procure and circulate such tracts and books as are adapted to explain, prove, vindicate and illustrate, the peculiar and essential doctrines of the gospel, and to discriminate between genuine and spurious religious affections and experience. And the Tracts and Books published and circulated by this Society, shall be in accordance with the doctrines of the gospel, as professed and defended by our Puritan ancestors in New England, and by the original founders of this Society."

The object of this Society is thus perfectly intelligible; expressed in somewhat different language it is, the general diffusion and circulation, in the form of books and tracts, of the great religious principles

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which are embodied in the writings of our Puritan ancestors, and which constitute the Puritan theology. This diffusion is to be accomplished both by sales and donations, both in New England and out of New England. Wherever our brethren and their children have migrated, whether westward to the shores of Ontario and Erie, to the banks of the Muskingum, the Wabash and the Mississippi, and thence over the "Father of waters," and beyond the Rocky Mountains; whether to the Empire State, and to the banks of the Delaware, and even to the whole northern margin of the Gulf of Mexico; thither would this Society gladly send its Congregational books and tracts. There would we gladly indoctrinate, not only the sons of the Pilgrims, but all others who shall willingly receive it, with the Puritan theology. Especially is it the present wish and aim of the Society, to supply the home missionary pastors in the Western churches with its publications. They would send, in the form of pastor's libraries, the works of Bellamy, and of Hopkins, and of the younger Edwards, the works of the patriarch Robinson and of Thomas Shepard, with those of the early and also of late Puritan writers, to the Congregational churches in Ohio and Indiana, in Wisconsin and Minnesota, as they have already sent similar libraries to all the Congregational churches in Michigan which have pastors, and to many churches in Illinois and Iowa. The members of this Society, knowing the inestimable value of these works, believing that no uninspired men have more clearly or powerfully illustrated the great truths

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of the Bible, would gladly augment their influence in every direction by their diffusion. That an object so important may be suitably presented, and that the needful pecuniary means for its accomplishment may be increased, they now, for the first time, take their appropriate place, as a Society, in the public exercises of this Anniversary Week; and they have seen fit to select him who now addresses you, to discourse on the occasion.

What theme then, it may be asked, specially befits this first public anniversary? What should commend itself alike to the favorers of this Society, to the professional taste of not a few of this audience, and to the convictions of any right-hearted son of New England? It may be proper for the speaker to say that, when putting to himself this query, there was but one and that an almost immediate answer. As he was to solicit the co-operation of others in promoting this wide diffusion of the writings of the Puritan divines of New England, how could he more effectually appeal to every auditor than by describing the character of these writings themselves? These tracts and books, including those which the Congregational Board has already published, and the far greater number which it purposes hereafter to publish, will contain the writings of most of our profoundest theologians. The works of Bellamy, the worthy associate and coadjutor of the first Edwards; the works of Hopkins, the theological student of Edwards, and the friend of each of these eminent men; and the works of the younger Edwards, so nearly approach-

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ing, in many attributes, to the pre-eminence of the father, are already numbered among its publications. The works of Robinson, the father of modern Congregationalism, and those of Thomas Shepard, the luminary of Cambridge,—seemingly for a time eclipsed, but now again breaking forth on the darkness,—are also thus numbered. Nor is it improbable that the works of the first Edwards, in an enlarged, and in every sense an improved edition, may be soon added to this noble roll of publications; nor that those of some of New England's other great divines may, at no distant time, be issued from the same source. We may then rightly affirm that this Society has assumed upon itself the duty of publishing the Theology of the Puritans, or, in more fitting language even, *the Theology of New England*, to the world. A duty, a trust, most responsible: a work, if fully performed, most noble!

The subject for remark will be, THE THEOLOGY OF NEW ENGLAND, a subject from which the speaker would shrink, did he not feel assured that such a treatment of it only would be expected from him, as consists with the circumstances of this occasion. I shall attempt to exhibit the character of this theology, and of the eminent men, as theologians, in whose writings it is embodied, by describing some of its prominent features.

I would observe, then, that this Theology has been always characterized by *its Independence*. The importance of independent thinking to the

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theologian is so evident, that but few would speculatively controvert it. He is professedly a teacher, and *the* teacher, of the noblest of all sciences. If an eminent man, his pupils constitute, not only the successive classes of young men, who now fill our theological seminaries, and who formerly thronged the minister's narrow study, and followed him to the weekly conference, and hung upon his lips every Sabbath in the sanctuary; but they also include every minister who studies his published works, every intelligent layman who peruses them, every congregation whose pastor's doctrinal opinions he has contributed to form. Whatever other attributes, then, the professed theologian may possess, if he is not an independent thinker, he does not deserve the name. He is, on the contrary, the mere pupil of other men while he lives, should he pass the limit of eighty years; of great men, or of little men who are reputed great. He can exalt their theology, and dole it out piecemeal each Sabbath, as if it were an inferior utterance of inspiration; but he can neither with meekness, nor without meekness, give an answer to any man that asketh him a reason for the opinions which he oracularly inculcates. As little can any other than the independent thinker specifically meet the assaults of the skeptic, and drive out the caviller from his lurking place. What weight with such enemies to the truth, has an array of great names; what authority have creeds and catechisms, though sanctioned by a council as ancient as that of Nice, or by that modern and far nobler assembly—the Divines at Westminster? Such an individual, or

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any man who professes to preach the gospel, but who does not with honest independence of thought try every human synopsis and symbol of its infallible truths, has the painful consciousness of moving in habiliments which fit only far larger men, of acting over the tones and looks and attitudes of his instructors to half-drowsy audiences. A servile dependence is thus so dishonorable and annoying to any minister, and peculiarly to him who assumes in its humblest acceptation the name of theologian, that the importance, nay, the absolute necessity of its opposite,—Independence in the formation of our theological opinions, is almost of course admitted.

What then is this independence of thinking and of study, which I have specified as a prominent characteristic of New England Theology, and of its leading writers? Very different views of its nature would be given us in different quarters; and it may be pertinent to notice several of these, that we may the more accurately describe the Theology which we are contemplating. This true independence consists with some in slighting, if not virtually rejecting, the works of modern theologians. If, according to the proverb, Truth is the daughter of Time; still, we must go back to the records of antiquity to discover her abode. The apostolic and other early Fathers, who lived so near to the days of Christ, of John and Paul and Peter, who treasured up so many traditions of what the Saviour said and did, and of what the Apostles were subsequently inspired to do,—these are the true expounders of the gospel. Clement and Barnabas and Ignatius,

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Athanasius and Jerome and Augustine, are *the* theologians for their age, and for our age; and far behind them, yet far, far before the writers of the last two centuries, are Luther and Calvin, Bull and Hooker. With others, this independence consists in similarly slighting every thing which is not modern, and most of it must be very modern. The works of the Fathers are for them the contents of an enormous drag-net, in which the precious is so little in quantity, and this little is so inextricably mingled with the vile, that the results of a separation of the two elements would not compensate the laborer. And as for Luther and Calvin, or even Owen and Howe, they did not understand, as we do, the philosophy of the gospel. Yes, Truth is indeed the daughter of Time; buried, and, though immortal, all but lifeless under the superstitions and absurdities of long ages, it is our work to disinter her, that her charms may subdue the world. A modified form of this independence consists, with some, in neglecting the entire works of German theologians and Biblical critics for the last fifty years, because so many of these writers have been rationalists; and with others, it is displayed in shunning the whole body of Roman Catholic writers, because the Papacy, under whose standard they have served, is the Man of Sin. With not a few, even in our own land, one sign of true independence is, to disparage all who are not numbered in their own doctrinal school; while with many in Germany, and some among ourselves, it consists in what they term originality; and originality means, to differ from

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every one but themselves. Some of this may be deemed sportive, but it is all spoken in sober earnest.

We ask then again—What is a truly Independent Theology? And we answer that it is, if we mistake not, the characteristic spirit of the New England theologians already named, and of their younger associates; that spirit, in the search after theological knowledge, which, while implicitly submitting itself to the Bible, because its infallibility is admitted with full conviction, calls no uninspired teacher nor school of teachers, master; an independence, which gladly receives light from men of great name, and excludes it not from men of little name; which welcomes truth, as such, from ancients and moderns, from Protestant or Papist, from believer, heretic or skeptic; and which rejects error, whoever may be the endorser.

That these writers purposely formed their theology in subjection to the Bible, few have ever questioned: how far they have in fact succeeded, how far that theology is peculiarly scriptural, we shall inquire hereafter. But we ask,—What succession of writers, in any country or of any age, from the first century down to our own, have shown a more profound, childlike reverence for the teachings of God's word? This standard is with each of them ever the same; indisputable, absolute, supreme. And this is the highest style of independence in man; to know where its broad range of investigation is finally bounded; to stop short at the limit where his capacity, like the sinking eagle, folds its

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powerless wing, and then passively, gladly, to receive just such light as the uncreated sun bestows. But when ranging over the whole domain of theology, contemplated as a human science, the spirit of inquiry in each of them is instantly changed. Then they follow no man, as their master. We read in the Life of the first Edwards, of his eagerness to procure new theological works from his European correspondents; works which, when once transmitted, were not read by piecemeal, nor hurried over, but studied, doubtless, as he would study. Such was the characteristic spirit of them all. The theologian of Franklin informs us, that he gave his "attention to all subjects which appeared to be naturally connected with divinity; and that nothing assisted him more in defending the pure doctrines of the gospel, than a general acquaintance with prevalent errors and delusions in the Christian world." But none of them was a mere pupil, either of Augustine, or Luther, or Calvin; none of them adopted, as such, the Loci Communes of Melancthon, or the Augsburg Confession; none of them, while receiving the Westminster Catechism, as an admirable compendium of doctrinal belief, ever made it the standard of his faith. Not more eagerly does the bee augment his honeyed stores from garden, field and solitary flower, than did each of these theologians search for truth in the works of these and other eminent men of every age; but they identified themselves with no one of them. Neither of the Edwardses chose to be described as simply an Augustinian, or a Lutheran, or a Calvinist;

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neither Bellamy nor Hopkins, neither Smalley nor Emmons, nor others whom I might name, professedly received any man's system as their own. Or, if they rejected not the application to themselves of the term Calvinist, this implied not their unqualified adoption of Calvin's sentiments; but, simply, their preference of them, on the whole, as a theological scheme, to that of any other individual. In illustration, we may notice how unfrequently is reference made in their own writings to the works of these acknowledged leaders of the human mind; and when made, never intentionally, as thus securing conviction. When in controversy, they refer abundantly to the works of their opponents, quoting whenever they deem it necessary; the first Edwards, for example, to Whitby, to Chubb and Hobbs, to Taylor and to Williams; and the second Edwards, to West and to Chauncy. But when they are investigating any great subject of their own selection, where neither skeptics nor other errorists must be refuted, then, from the first Edwards down, each of them traverses the broad field as if it had been then first measured by his own footsteps; each of them pours forth his own independent conclusions, as if the studious world had then first become a docile auditor. There is no oracular dogmatism, no marching under banners inscribed with great names, no Parthian manœuvring, as conscious of the weakness of their cause; but each presses onward fearless and alone, as if his mission were simply and demonstrably to proclaim the truth. Their theology possesses thus a freshness, a nov-

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elty, and, as such, a charm, almost unequaled: however unadorned the style, or, as in some of their pages, men would say, "dry as a great drought," there is independent thought everywhere, there are great original ideas constantly looming up; and this is ornament sufficient to the thinking reader. Single, independent thinkers have thus risen up from time to time;—Luther in Germany, Calvin at Geneva, Pascal in France, Butler in England; but can such a train, can so bright a succession of independent minds, and especially of independent theologians, be found in any country for many centuries out of New England? It ought to be added, that this characteristic is as clearly marked in their independence of each other; each later, of every earlier, theologian. A half unconscious subserviency, or slavishness, is often created among thinkers and writers of the same country, by oneness of language, customs, sympathies and mental training,—the predecessors not only guiding, but moulding the successors. But aside from all those influences which are inevitable, because such was the design of God in the very structure of each nation, as a great community which was to be essentially the same in its successive generations, while diverse from all other nations, these New England writers have each contributed to form our theology, with an evident independence of one another. Bellamy and Hopkins would, doubtless, each have styled himself an Edwardean rather than a Calvinist, and so would Edwards the son, and Smalley and Emmons, and—if I may name him here—the grand-

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son of the first Edwards. Yet what book is more obviously on every page the very work of the writer, than the True Religion Delineated; than the System of Doctrines of Samuel Hopkins; than every treatise and sermon of Edwards the son; than every sermon of Emmons; and than the writings of those who followed Emmons? The differences, so far as these exist, which have thus characterized them no less than their union, each rendering the other the more conspicuous, are the result no less than the evidence of this independence. Nor can we dismiss this topic, without observing that they were independent of popular disfavor and outcry. They were lovers of peace; each of them prized as he ought, the value of a good name; but they loved truth more. The history of the overthrow of the Half-way Covenant scheme, an overthrow, the commencement of which was signalized by the exile of its great opponent from Northampton, and his banishment into the wilderness, is an instructive illustration here. No such tempest beat upon the uncovered head of any other of these distinguished men, yet several of them were constrained to display a similar fearlessness. The Arminianism which drove away Edwards, was as unfriendly to Bellamy, although it lacked the power to expel him from Bethlem. Hopkins preached and published what has been subsequently termed, "The System of Hopkinsianism," under a cloud of suspicion; much of it, we would hope, honestly excited by many ministers and pious laymen. While Emmons wrote and preached his characteristic views, much of the

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same suspicion, often honestly cherished and honestly expressed, met him from every quarter. Yet each of them could say here of the friends, as Paul said of the enemies, of the cross: "But none of these things move me." Each of them held on his course of thinking, of preaching, of publishing, of living, unchanged as if no cloud had ever crossed their skies.

As another of the prominent features of this theology, I would observe that it has been *steadily progressive*. This epithet scarcely requires a definition: it is intended that this theology, instead of being what mathematicians term, a constant quantity, has been always making advances; and that these advances, during the last one hundred and twenty years, have been very great. There are some persons who would wholly dissent from this description. Of these, one portion would refuse assent, because they attach their own peculiar meaning to the word, Theology. With them it denotes a system of divine truth, which, whether contemplated in each of its parts, or as a whole, is to be absolutely free from error. The work must indeed have been written by uninspired hands, and an uninspired mind must have been its author; but it may not claim to be a body of sacred truth, it cannot be deemed true theology, unless it exactly harmonizes with the Bible. If this is the real meaning of the word, Theology, then they might affirm that New-England theology has made no advances; nor, it may be added, has any other system of theology, from the days of Augustine; nor, it may be also

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added, is there but one real work of theology to be found on earth, and that is the Bible, for the Bible is the only literally infallible book. But this notion is a mere mistake. Theology, although the subjects of which it treats are divine, and although the Bible which contains them is an inspired volume, is as truly a science as mathematics or metaphysics, as ethics or law; and as a science, it is as truly and necessarily the work of uninspired men as is any other science. Even if theology included nothing but the scheme of revealed religion, (instead of also including, as it necessarily does, the scheme of natural religion, and each fortified by the truths and facts of creation, providence, and our own consciousness,) men must give to the great truths and facts of the Bible a scientific form; they must combine and arrange them into a system, or there would be no theology; just as they must arrange the truths and facts respecting number, form and motion, into a science, or there would be no mathematics. What sort of book, let me ask, would the Bible be, had it been revealed to prophets and apostles as a *treatise* on theology?

The other portion refuse assent, because they believe and at times virtually affirm, that all real advances in theology have ceased for centuries. Athanasius and Augustine, with other Christian Fathers, laid the foundations and then raised the edifice; and the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries have added all the necessary conveniences and ornaments. But why, we ask, is the idea of all subsequent advancement in theology, an absurdity?

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Why were these Christian Fathers originally needed? Their predecessors had, as truly as themselves, the unerring oracles. Why were the theologians of Wittenberg and Geneva subsequently needed? And if we may look farther down time's broad stream, why were the Synod of Dort, and the Assembly of Divines, needed? If theology made progress until this later era, why should it not have been making progress since, even till the very days of the Edwardses, and of their compeers and successors? If the revelation which God has given us of himself in the natural world has been, for ages, becoming clearer, more intelligible, as the result of profound study; why should not the revelation which he has given us of himself in the Bible, be also constantly growing clearer, as the reward of such study? In other words, why should not theology have been long making, and be destined hereafter to make, great advances? The Romanist, with his infallible church, may consistently deny this; but none others.

The great men whose writings we are briefly noticing, cherished no such absurd sentiments. Had they welcomed them, we should have never heard of New England Theology. I shall cite the opinions of two of them, to show how foreign and hostile are these notions to the genius of Congregationalism.

The first of the two is the patriarch Robinson, who thus addressed the Pilgrims, on the very eve of their embarkation in the Mayflower: "If God reveal any thing to you, by any other instrument of his, be as ready to receive it as ever you were to

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receive any truth by my ministry; for I am verily persuaded, the Lord has more truth yet to break forth out of his holy word. For my part, I cannot sufficiently bewail the condition of the Reformed Churches, who are come to a period in religion, and will go at present no farther than the instruments of their reformation. The Lutherans cannot be drawn to go beyond what Luther saw: whatever part of his will our God has revealed to Calvin, they will die rather than embrace it. And the Calvinists, you see, stick fast where they were left by that great man of God, who yet saw not all things. This is a misery much to be lamented; for though they were burning and shining lights in their times, yet they penetrated not into the whole counsel of God; but were they now living, would be as willing to embrace further light as that which they at first received."

The second is the younger Edwards, who in his sermon at the ordination of his nephew in Greenfield, Connecticut, in 1783, thus addressed the latter: "Improvement is by no means at an end; and those men err exceedingly, who lament that they live at this late period of the world wherein improvement and science have been anticipated, and there is no room left for further discoveries. There is abundant room for discovery and improvement in every science, especially in theology. As God is infinite, he is not and cannot be perfectly known by men, or even by angels. They and the saints in glory are constantly studying and improving in knowledge. Theological subjects are the things

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which they desire to look into. They will carry on their improvements to eternity, yet will never have exhausted the truth. Much more is there room for the utmost improvements which we can make in this life. Though the canon of Scripture is complete, and we are to expect no further revelations; yet many new truths will break forth from the word of God, which, though now contained in it, for want of attention, and comparing spiritual things with spiritual, are not yet seen. Further discoveries, even in moral and divine subjects, are also to be expected from the candid disquisitions of unbiased reason. If ministers of the gospel would be faithful and diligent in their studies and researches after truth, there is not the least reason to doubt, but that great improvements would be the consequence."

Let me now proceed to notice some of the elements of the progress or advancement which this theology has made, if I mistake not, through the labors of these writers. It is not affirmed that none of the great principles which are here involved, and which they have triumphantly established were never maintained or suggested previously; for the reverse is the fact. But it is intended that many of these principles—we may properly term them, doctrines—were first propounded by themselves; and that they have given to them the relative importance which these doctrines now assume, in every full treatise of theology. In this notice I shall be as concise as possible.

I would observe, then, that the relations of human and divine agency, including the whole subjects

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of God's decrees and man's liberty and necessity, and thus defining the real nature and extent of human accountability, have been illustrated by these writers as by none others,—a dense cloud of contradiction and confusion having been thus finally cleared away. In close connection with this subject, they have poured great light on the nature of holiness and of sin, as inherently and always the same; as consisting mainly, if not entirely, in the voluntary affections; that the one is voluntary conformity to the great law of love or disinterested good will; and that the other is its precise reverse. In legitimate sequence and order, they have not less clearly displayed the nature of that mysterious connection between the apostasy of Adam on the one part, and the personal sins and the sinful character of each of his descendants on the other. Nor have they less enlightened a kindred aspect of this last subject, by elucidating what is the scriptural idea of imputation —so far as this word is properly used—in the relations which we thus sustain, both to Adam and to Christ. Here also, in its scriptural connection, they have given great clearness to the doctrine of Atonement; pointing out its relations as purely a great moral measure, to the moral government of God; and thus evincing the absolute freeness and grace of the offers of salvation. They have as distinctly shown that the only proper reply to these offers is the immediate penitence of the sinner, and his subsequent life of faith and godliness; and that for the least delay of such an answer, he is inexcusable. Nor is this theology less luminous, in

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contrast with prior systems, in its description of practical or experimental religion in its various graces and evidences; the counterfeit being thus distinguished from the genuine, the hypocrite and the honest self-deceiver from the doubting and the assured disciple. I will only add, that, in the solution of that most mysterious, most awful of all theological subjects, the existence of moral evil, this system has also made advancement. Its writers have clambered farther up these dizzy steeps, and have from thence looked farther down on the plains and abysses, on the sunshine and midnight below. They have ascertained more clearly the final barriers to all human discoveries in this ocean, now of summer waves, and now of thick-ribbed ice, and now of molten lava; thus instructing us where we may intelligently believe, and where we must submissively trust.

Ere we change the topic, may I not say, how wide the compass, how vast the importance of these additions to the existing theology. Strike them out, were it practicable, from the broad domain which we now call our own, what a labyrinth of inconsistencies and contradictions, what chasms and desolations should we frequently behold!

Let me remark, as another characteristic of this theology, that it is *truly scriptural*. This, it may be said, however, is but frigid praise. A theology which harmonizes not with the Bible, which is not, in all its foundations, directly built on the Bible, cannot be anything, it is said in the words of Paul, but "wood, hay, stubble." This is doubtless true,

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yet who perceives not that this harmony must be in every case relative, and that it can never be absolute; until it can be truly asserted of some one system of theology, in distinction from all others, that it is perfect, because its teachings are identical with those of inspiration. No two evangelical preachers or writers are, in the full sense, equally scriptural; nor are any two symbolical creeds or catechisms, unless one is a mere transcript or abstract of the other. When we would thus describe the theology of New England, we intend that it is more scriptural than the Apostle's Creed, or than the Nicene Creed; than the theology of Luther and Melanchthon, of Knapp and Tholuck and Hengstenberg; than the theology of Leighton, of Butler, and Magee, or than the piebald theology of Coleridge; than that of Symington and Chalmers; or than that of Calvin and Turretin. Or, if such comparisons are thought to savor of presumption, it is intended that this theology would peculiarly harmonize with such a system of divine truth as the great Apostle to the Gentiles would have prepared soon after completing his Epistle to the Romans, had he been then led to undertake such a work, and without the immediate guidance of inspiration in its execution. It is intended that this theology is truly scriptural in this sense, that its teachings receive a prompt and hearty response in the deepest consciousness of the most eminent Christians; that as the natural eye delights in the pictures drawn by the morning light on the face of creation, and the natural taste keenly relishes the fruits of summer, so

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the pure spiritual eye is at home amid the delineations of spiritual objects given us by these writers, and the spiritual taste is then healthfully and exquisitely gratified. I intend that such would be the only decision of an acute skeptic, were he thoroughly to compare this theology with other systems, if we suppose him capable of deciding impartially. I intend that the great men who are its authors are peculiarly scriptural, because they constantly exhibit God in his character and government as very great, as ineffably holy and lovely and awful; and man, in contrast, as very little and exceedingly sinful; because they present Christ in his person as the God-Man, as most "wonderful," and in his offices as inestimably precious; because none have more vividly described sin as inherently hateful and abominable, and holiness as the only absolute moral excellence. I intend that such is their theology, because it throws a steady light on the otherwise inexplicable history of man and of Providence; because none other has given such solemnity to life, as the term of probation, or invested with such glory and such gloom the dread alternatives of retribution.

It may be said here, that much of this is unmeaning, or, at the best, indiscriminate eulogy. I would not justly incur this criticism, and shall therefore vindicate the preceding train of remark by an appeal to two well-known general facts. One is this: that wherever this theology has been faithfully preached, there another gospel than that which Paul preached has either never found a welcome, or not until after

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a long interval. The broad regions of New England, larger than the Old England from which our Puritan Forefathers emigrated, were all, with the exception of Rhode Island, originally possessed by Congregationalists. The kindred evangelical denominations to which we now cordially extend the hand of fellowship, had scarcely a nominal existence here during the first century; and in far later years others, also, have for a season multiplied, to whom, so far as respects their religious faith, neither Cotton nor Hooker, neither Shepard nor Davenport, nor the Mathers, any more than ourselves, could ever say "God speed." The history of their first distinct existence, of their growth—rapid in many places from a certain period, of their subsequent general decline, evidently already begun, and widely extending, and ominous of but one issue, will, when adequately written hereafter, be full of rich instruction; but among all the facts which that history will then record, few, most few indeed, will be found the instances in which the theology that we are contemplating, when fully preached, has been speedily supplanted by an heretical faith. In temperate regions, whether geographical or moral, the night never immediately succeeds the day; the transition is first to distinct twilight, and then twilight gradually gives place to dimness, and the dimness to full darkness. Yet even this gradual descent, completed, when at all, only after the lapse of several generations, has never been effected in any of the churches once filled by these theologians. Northampton, Bethlem, Great Barrington, New Haven, Berlin,

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Franklin, and Greenfield in Connecticut, still retain the same faith; the Lord that bought his people, is still acknowledged in them all. Of hundreds of other churches, the same report can be now made; and where a different narrative must be recited, there, perhaps in every instance, the theology of the Puritans was first succeeded by one somewhat less scriptural. The truth was for a long season slightly diluted; and then compromises with error were slowly effected; and then, at length, when the Fathers had gone to their rest and were forgotten, another gospel, another salvation, has been openly published.

The other general fact is this: the New England Theology has been always productive of conversions; it has been, pre-eminently, a Theology of Revivals. None will gainsay the truth of this affirmation. This, I say, is the great standing fact, and no attestation can be more decisive. It is the same with that which was borne by the conversions of the day of Pentecost,—that the preaching was scriptural; for men are born again by the word of God, they are sanctified by the truth, and by the truth only. We know, let me repeat it, of no higher evidence. The theology, the preaching of which has thus, for many generations, been the means of turning men from sin to holiness, which thus radically changes the moral nature and works the mightiest results ever beheld on this earth, must be scriptural. The contradictions of angels would be properly rejected here. We speak of conversions in immense numbers, and of every age, from childhood up; in

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youth's gay bloom, in early maturity, in vigorous middle life, in declining years, and to the verge of superannuation; of conversions from every condition and station indiscriminately, whether of the day-laborer, of the princely merchant, or the chief magistrate; whether of the humblest or the loftiest reach of intellect. We speak of conversions that were wrought, not in times of frantic excitement, when preacher and hearer were swept on alike by the headlong current; but by the still small voice speaking inwardly to the soul, and uttering simply the word of God; of conversions in immense numbers, which subsequently, while the vital current continued to beat, endured the most searching tests; dying not out when the first unnatural ardors had subsided, vibrating not between the Cross and the World—because they belonged wholly to neither, steadily refusing homage to earth's three great idols, vanquishing the world's seductions and its terrors, and thus holding on to the end. We speak, we say, of such conversions, that have been marked neither by timid superstition nor wild enthusiasm, but by intelligent and immovable conviction; which have often encountered many a changing wind of doctrine, and resisted many a popular delusion and learned heresy unharmed, which the skeptic's sophistry and the skeptic's ridicule have both assailed in vain. The stable, intelligent piety of New England has been thus largely formed and perpetuated, from the era of the Mayflower's arrival. Such are the fruits; can the nature of the tree be doubtful? Can such a theology be other than scriptural, and pre-eminently scriptural?

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I shall notice, on this occasion, but one additional feature. This theology *has directly and indirectly formed the New England character.* I assume, when thus remarking, that the descendants of the Pilgrims possess a distinctive character; one which is known and read, however it may be approved or disapproved, of all men. It is not merely intended, what few would question, that the natives of New England are distinguished, as Anglo-Americans, from the English, the Scotch, the Irish, and from the nations of continental Europe; but that they are also as really and perceptibly distinct from the natives of Pennsylvania and Delaware, from those of the Southern States, and of the South Western States. Severed from the old world since the very landing at Plymouth, when, like the inmates of the ark, they stepped forth to take possession of the new world, and maintaining for nearly two centuries and a half a homogeneousness without parallel in the history of man, save in one instance—that of the Israelites—they have displayed a character equally marked; and that character, we say, has been essentially formed by their theology. When we affirm this, we but assert principles whose efficacy is rendered controlling in man by his very nature. Moral teaching has more power to mould the mind, to quicken the intellect and give ardor to the affections, than any other teaching; and religious, or, in the full, broad sense of the term, doctrinal teaching, than any other form of moral teaching. It is not true, as a matter of fact, what has been often incautiously asserted, that man is not a relig-

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ious being. Man is never a converted being, a holy being, unless divine grace shall interpose to secure such a result; but he is a religious being, as truly as he is a social or an intelligent being. In the whole boundless circle of realities, no truth can be presented to him to which he is more keenly alive by the very constitution of his nature, than to truth which respects God and himself, this life and the future life. This truth will not, as has been just said, of itself convert him; but it will sway his understanding, conscience, social affections; it will restrain natural appetite, it will thus form the man, and control the hamlet, the city, the nation, as can neither philosophy nor law, neither the moralist, nor public opinion, nor the bayonet. Whether the truth is pure, or largely mingled with error, such ever has been, such must be, its efficacy. We see this illustrated in the Mohammedan; for it is Islamism, which has made him the sensual fanatic which he is. We see it in the Romanist; for it is the religion of his priest which has made him bigoted, blindly credulous, and persecuting. We see it in the votary of Puseyism; for it is the intermingling of great religious truths with the ceremonial absurdities which overshadow them in his creed, that has rendered him what he is—a subject for pity and wonder to the intelligent Christian. Shall we then doubt, whether the theology which we are still contemplating, and which, as preached and read and familiarly taught in other modes, has formed the basis of religious instruction among us for two centuries, has essentially framed the New England character? What

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system of truth has so clearly revealed man to himself, both in the debasement and the loftiness of his nature, and in the awfulness of his destiny? What other has thus disclosed God, in the effulgence of his perfections; or Christ's redemption, as the absolutely peculiar and transforming element in the Christian scheme? What other has thus inseparably united life, in all its aspects and incidents, with duty; so that to be, must, to the devout mind, be ever the same as to act under "the Great Taskmaster's eye?" What other has thus entered the remotest *penetralia* of thought, of conscience, of affection, and struck with such power each key-note of the spirit, and with all these influences gradually formed the man—first for his family, and then for his calling, and then for the church, and then for the state, and in all for this world, and in all for the next?

It may be thought, however, that, in thus describing the formative power of this theology, I am overlooking several other equally effective influences. Our *New England System of Education*, it may be said for example, has been as vital an element in the whole process. We cannot overrate, I admit, the usefulness of our common schools, our academies, and our colleges; annihilate them, and the age of barbarism would speedily return; but if we stop here, we have traced the stream only half way to its source. We go far back of our entire system of education, and ask—What is that primary creative element, which has established the school, the academy, and the college, which has there

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trained the children of New England until the present hour; and must we not answer, that it has been furnished by this theology? It laid the foundations of Harvard, of Yale, of Dartmouth, of every other college and academy and school; it has made them all what they are, and through their instrumentality it has educated our sons and our daughters. Others may point us to the *Free Institutions of New England*, as a no less formative element. Here also, it is cheerfully conceded, we cannot overestimate the influence. We cling to these institutions as we do to life, we prize them next to the gospel. Could we be deprived of them by stealth or by force, the sons of the Pilgrims would become fit to be slaves or the owners of slaves; sooner than part with them, sooner than suffer slavery to gain any foothold among us ourselves, we will welcome disunion, and then, if needs be, migration over another ocean, to lay the foundations of a new empire of freedom. But here also we have failed to reach the fountain; the subordinate, is again mistaken for the primary agency. We ask—Whence came our Free Institutions; and we ascribe them, under God, to the source of our whole system of education—to New England Theology. It was the Puritan theology, which, with Oliver Cromwell as its leader, broke down the tyranny of Charles I., in Old England. It was the Puritan theology which brought these Free Institutions across the Atlantic, and which has nurtured a still stronger love for them, if possible, through two centuries, until this hour. Others still may here refer us to *the pure morality* of

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